NOVA SCOTIA
Disabled Persons Commission

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1999-2000 ANNUAL REPORT

NOVA SCOTIA
DISABLED PERSONS' COMMISSION

September, 2000

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1. MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

I am pleased to provide the 1999-2000 Annual Report of the Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission. The Report gives a brief overview of some of the issues and initiatives that have been on the Commission Agenda over the past year.

I would like to thank Commission members for their work and commitment to the cause of disability in Nova Scotia. This year sees the end of my term as a member of the Disabled Persons Commission and as Chair. It has been a privilege and an honour to be a member of the Commission.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Commission members over the past twelve months, whose term of appointments will also be ending this Autumn:

Community Representatives:

Ted Morrison, Vice-Chair, Glace Bay
Ralph Ferguson, Pictou
Barb Welsford, Lunenburg County
Craig MacKinnon, Halifax
Frank O'Sullivan, Halifax
Scott Hemming, Halifax

Government Representatives:

Craig Hinchey, Community Services
Aileen Waller-Hebb, Housing and Municipal Affairs
Shaun Whittleton, Education
Brian Wilbur, Health
Crystal Taylor, Human Resources

Your commitment and hard work is greatly appreciated.

In recognition of new directions and priorities of the Province of Nova Scotia and in order that Commission can provide the benefit of their experience and backgrounds to provide recommendations for the improvement/re-definition of the Commission in the future, the Commission has reviewed it's role and mandate. It is the Commission's continued viewpoint that Government must collaborate with the disability community on policy and programs that directly impact persons with disabilities. This commitment to collaboration is highlighted in the bilateral agreement persons with disabilities. Specifically the bilateral agreement states:

> *"The Province {of Nova Scotia} will obtain the views of stakeholders in the planning and management of the Programs and Services cost shared under this Agreement. The intent is to achieve an active partnership among government agencies and stakeholders."*

The Bi-lateral Agreement further clarifies:

"The ... initiative will emphasize accountability to consumers and the general public,... Mechanisms for assessing and evaluating the anticipated and actual results of this initiative would involve persons with disabilities, either using formal structures or advisory groups."

It is our view the Disabled Persons Commission provides the most appropriate mechanism to achieve this both under Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities and on other significant government initiatives. In 1999-2000, for example, the Commission, with the disability community, was actively engaged in discussions concerning the Community Access-Ability Initiative and assisted in the program's definition and introduction.

On behalf of the Commission, I would respectfully recommend the following for consideration of the Government of Nova Scotia with regard to the role of the Disabled Persons Commission:

It is recommended the Province of Nova Scotia continue to support the Commission and ensure that it has the resources, both financial and human, to fulfill its mandate.

It is recommended the Commission, at least once annually, hold a meeting outside the Halifax Metro area, in order to hear directly from Nova Scotians with their issues and concerns.

It is recommended the Province of Nova Scotia consult the Commission on all matters of policy and programming where there may be an impact on the lives of persons with disabilities.

It is recommended the Commission continue to work collaboratively with community partners to foster the full citizenship of Nova Scotians with disabilities. This should include working pro-actively with the "Partnership for Access Awareness" as well as the Community Partners.

Communications has been highlighted as a major issue the Commission must address. Communications with community stakeholders, the general public and the Coordinating Committee of Ministers. It is recommended attempts be made to address this issue and to foster the necessary resources to provide regular updates on the issues and concerns being addressed by the Commission.

The past Commission engaged in some discussion on the following issues that should be continued in the future:

The development of a "disability lens" that could be a tool utilized by the Province in assessing the implications of program and policy development on the lives of persons with disabilities

Establish an ongoing and formal arrangement with the aboriginal community and the Senior Citizens Secretariate in order to collaborate on disability issues that impact on both

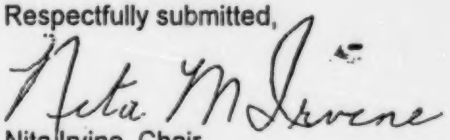
communities.

Promote the development of a Corporate Policy for the Province in regards to access to information for citizens with a "print handicap"

Continue to collaborate with the Commission's counterparts in other Provinces on matters of disability that are national in scope.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Commission for their support and assistance over the past year and wish you all well in future endeavors in support of Nova Scotians with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,



Nita Irvine, Chair
Disabled Persons Commission

2. THE DISABLED PERSONS COMMISSION

2.1 BACKGROUND

The Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission was established under the authority of the Disabled Persons Commission Act in 1989. The Act provides a mechanism to ensure a framework exists, whereby Nova Scotians with disabilities can advise policy-makers and program developers on the needs of persons with disabilities. The Act provides a mechanism for persons with disabilities to become policy advisors on issues and concerns which directly affect their lives.

Purpose

The purpose of the Disabled Persons Commission Act is to:

a. provide for the participation of persons with disabilities in the development of government policies and programs which directly relate to or affect persons with disabilities;

b. ensure that the concerns of persons with disabilities will be promoted and considered by the government, especially in matters of policy and where concerns affect several departments of the government;

c. ensure that the concerns of persons with disabilities, are conveyed to the proper department of government and are dealt with in an appropriate, effective and timely manner.

Objectives

The objectives of the Disabled Persons Commission are to:

a. to assist and advise the Coordinating Committee of Ministers on the needs and abilities of persons with disabilities;

b. make the general public aware of the needs and abilities of persons with disabilities;

c. make persons with disabilities and the general public aware of government programs that serve persons with disabilities;

d. make the general public aware of what it can do to facilitate the integration of persons with disabilities into the social and economic mainstream of the community.

2.2 CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

The Disabled Persons Commission is primarily responsible to the Government of Nova Scotia, through the Coordinating Committee of Ministers. The Chairperson of this Coordinating Committee is the Minister responsible for reporting on disabled persons, the Minister of Community Services. Membership on the Coordinating Committee is comprised of Ministries that have a direct stake in

provision of services for persons with disabilities.

The following Ministries are represented on the Coordinating Committee of Ministers:

Minister of Community Services
Minister of Health
Minister of Education
Minister of Transportation and Public Works
Minister of Labour
Minister of Housing & Municipal Affairs

2.3 COMMISSION MEMBERS

In 1999-2000 the members of the Disabled Persons Commission were as follows:

Nita Irvine	Chair, Wolfville
Ted Morrison	Vice-Chair, Glace Bay
Craig MacKinnon	Halifax
Barb Welsford	Lunenburg
Frank O'Sullivan	Halifax
Scott Hemming	Halifax
Ralph Ferguson	Pictou
Shaun Whittleton	Department of Education and Culture
Craig Hinchey	Department of Community Services
Brian Wilbur	Department of Health
Crystal Taylor	Department of Human Resources
Aileen Waller-Hebb	Department of Housing and Municipal Affairs

3. A DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE DISABILITY RATE IN NOVA SCOTIA

In response to a request received from the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities, the Health Information and Evaluation Section of the Department of Health investigated the high rates of disability in Nova Scotia. From this investigation the Department of Health released a report entitled *"Disability Profiles for Nova Scotia and Canada: Why the Discrepancy?"*. The purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons for the high rates of disability in Nova Scotia and to determine, if possible, policy directions from the results. Specifically, the objectives of this report were: 1) to confirm the high rate of disability in Nova Scotia 2) to determine the components contributing to the high rate of disability 3) removal of the age bias factor to determine a less biased disability rate and 4) an exploration of why potential causes lead to the high disability rate in Nova Scotia.

In general, the results of the Department of Health report stated that although Nova Scotia does have a higher disability rate than the other provinces in Canada ," *it was not possible, to suggest why the rates were so much higher*" although it was likely that the rate of mobility disability is truly higher in Nova Scotia than in the rest of Canada. The report concluded, that despite the information currently existing on persons with disabilities, that without good evidence of what is contributing to the high rates of disability in Nova Scotia, it was difficult to formulate a plan of action to reduce the incidence of disability. Finally the report noted that more study was needed to provide clear reasons for the observed differences in disability rates.

Following the release of the report by the Department of Health, the Disabled Persons Commission met with the Department of Health to discuss the results of the study and to determine if there were any other means or methods of approaching the problem. These meetings resulted in the establishment of a sub-committee between the Department of Health and the Disabled Persons Commission. The role of the sub-committee was to contact Statistics Canada to request special data analysis to be conducted on the Health and Activities Limitation Survey at the design of the sub-committee. Since most of the information collected by Statistics Canada in the Health Activities Limitation Survey had not presently been analyzed or published, the data may contain information that would help resolve some the questions around the disability rate in Nova Scotia.

The work of this Committee was completed in 1999 and the final report is available from the Commission.

The results of the study conducted by the Commission support and extend the findings of the study conducted by the Department of Health. Regarding the disability rate in Nova Scotia, this study found through the examination of four different methodologies convincing evidence that Nova Scotia does have the highest disability rate in Canada. However measured, disability is in fact more common in Nova Scotia than in the rest of Canada.

Although one would expect variation in the rate of disability across the province, the results of this study found Nova Scotia has extreme regional differences in the disability rate. Areas such as Cape Breton (the Sydneys) and Southwest Nova were almost double the average Canadian rate. In contrast, Dartmouth and Halifax West were four percent lower than the Canadian average. These results clearly have significant implications for the development and allocation of program

resources for persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia.

Regarding the demographic makeup of disability in Nova Scotia, the study found that in comparison to the Canadian data, Nova Scotia had a significantly higher rate of mobility disability. All other types of disability as defined by Statistics Canada were similar to or slightly below the Canadian average rate. Although disability increases with age, no significant differences were observed in different age grouping between Nova Scotia and Canada. These results were consistent with the results of the study carried out by the Department of Health. In addition, an analysis of disability by age and geographical area in Nova Scotia showed no significant difference between Nova Scotia and Canada.

The disability severity level was also investigated in the study. The results indicated Nova Scotia had lower disability rates which were classified as mild in nature, however, moderately severe levels were significantly higher than the Canadian average.

As a final demographic measure, the study investigated the number of persons with disabilities residing in health related institutions over three different age categories. Although the rate was 2.2 percent higher in the Nova Scotia for the 15 to 64 years of age category, the number of persons residing in health related institutions was so low when compared with the rest of the province that it would, in general, have limited impact on the overall disability rate in Nova Scotia.

In addition to demographic factors, the study attempted to identify the possible causes or conditions that resulted in the existing disability. These results indicated disabilities that resulted from the natural aging process; psychological or physical abuse; accidents that occurred at home, work, or in a motor vehicle; were lower in Nova Scotia than the rest of Canada. However, disabilities that were related to diseases or illnesses; existed at birth; or which had an unknown origin; were significantly higher in Nova Scotia as compared to the Canadian average. In fact, persons who reported that they were uncertain as to the cause of their disability were 5.7 percent higher in Nova Scotia.

For individual types of disabilities in Nova Scotia, (e.g. seeing, hearing, speaking, mobility and agility disabilities), higher rates existed in which the cause of the disability was reported as unknown by the respondents. Higher disability rates were also found in Nova Scotia for the speaking related disabilities that resulted from a disease or illness. Of particular interest, higher rates were observed in the mobility disability category as a result of a disease or illness; or conditions that existed at birth. Since approximately one in three persons with a disability in Nova Scotia have a mobility disability, a considerable proportion of the higher disability rate in Nova Scotia can be explained by these results.

In addition, the study found Nova Scotia ranked only second or lower in comparison to other provinces in Canada on all identifiable causes of disability. If this is correct, one may ask why does Nova Scotia have such a high rate of disability? The answer appears to be that Nova Scotia, unlike other provinces, has high rates on several key causes which effect the largest "mobility" disability group. These results it would appear drive up the overall disability rate of the province.

Since it was determined by the geographical analysis that much of the higher disability rate in Nova Scotia existed in the rural areas of the province, an analysis of the rural areas by cause or

condition was carried out. The results revealed even higher rates in the mobility disability category as a result of a disease or illness, or conditions that existed at birth. These results provided additional support to the overall conclusions of the study.

Finally, a suggestion which was reported in the study conducted by the Department Heath was that perhaps Nova Scotian physicians tended to be less aggressive regarding post-injury mobilization and rehabilitation when compared with their counterparts in other provinces. This, it was speculated, resulted in higher disability rates as indicated by an increase in the number of Workers Compensation Board claims. However, the results of this study did not support this view. The results found that Nova Scotia ranks only sixth highest in Canada for workplace injuries. In addition, data collected from the National Work Injuries Statistics Program indicated Nova Scotia actually has one of the lowest time loss injury rates in Canada and the rate actually deceased slightly between 1986 and 1991.

Although this study has provided some interesting new information about persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia, many questions remained unanswered. Although the data indicated the increased rates of disability in Nova Scotia were in part related to diseases or illness or conditions which existed at birth, it was not possible to identify the types of diseases or "existing at birth" conditions. This information was simply not available from the Health and Activities Limitation Survey. Without more specific information it is difficult to define a clear plan of action or formulated a strategy to facilitate diagnosis, prevention, rehabilitation, and other services so essential to persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia. Further investigation utilizing other data such as the National Population Health Survey may help to further our understanding of the causes of disability in Nova Scotia. The identification of underlying illness and birth related conditions would help in facilitating a clear health strategy for persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia.

Considering the high rate of disability in Nova Scotia and the expected increase in the rate of disability during the next decade, an understanding of the causes and occurrences of disability in Nova Scotia is essential in developing programs and policies for persons with disabilities. Considering these facts and the results of the study, it is recommended that:

- The Health and Activities Limitation Survey should include questions which would help to identify the reasons and causes for the regional differences in the rate of disability. This information would be vital in developing Health related programs and polices for persons with disabilities..

- That the sample size of the Health and Activities Limitation Survey be large enough for provinces such as Nova Scotia to provide for meaningful cross-tabulations and statistical analysis that would provide appropriate and useful information from the data for program planning in Nova Scotia.

- It is recommended that Statistics Canada ensure that the Health and Activities Limitation Survey be carried out following every census period in Canada. Since the Health and Activities Limitation Survey was not carried out in 1996, the most current information in Canada is for the year 1991.

- It is recommended that Statistic Canada develop more inclusive definitions of disability for

the purpose of the Health and Activities Limitation Survey. Identification of mental disabilities, developmental disabilities and learning disabilities would be helpful in understanding other possible causes for the high rate of disability in Nova Scotia.

- Since this study found the high rate of disability in Nova Scotia is in part a result of disease, illness and conditions existing at birth, that the Department of Health continue to investigate possible causal mechanisms of disability in Nova Scotia by researching other data bases such as the National Population Health Survey.

4. MEETING WITH COORDINATING COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

In 1999 the Disabled Persons Commission had a meeting with the Coordinating Committee of Ministers at which time the Commission tabled it's 1998-99 Annual Report and presented several issues of concern to the Ministers.

Among these issues were:

a. Social Assistance Restructuring

b. Sign Language Interpreter Services Policy

c. Inclusive Transportation Pilot Project Initiative

d. "Visitability"

e. Assistive Technology Community Outreach

f. Access to Government Real Property

As well the Commission tabled its concern over the postponement of the Community Access-Ability Program at this meeting and it was agreed by both the Committee of Ministers and the Commission that the Initiative should be re-visited following the government's program review and that the Ministers recognized the need for a such a program and would work collaboratively with the Commission and the Community for the program's re-establishment.

5. EMPLOYABILITY ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Commission played a central role in providing advice as the Employability Assistance for People Initiative continues to be implemented. The Commission supported and participated on the Interim Reference Committee along with representatives of Addictions Services, Mental Services, and the Departments of Health, Education and Community Services.

Following community consultation in June, 1998, there was established an "Interim Reference Committee" to assist the Province of Nova Scotia design and implement a new Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities Initiative.

The impetus for community participation in the new agreement comes from the Bi-Lateral Agreement signed by both the Federal and Provincial governments which states:

> *"The Province will obtain the views of stakeholders in the planning and management of the Programs and Services cost shared under this Agreement. The intent is to achieve an active partnership among government agencies and stakeholders."*

The Bi-lateral Agreement further clarifies:

> *"The EAPD initiative will emphasize accountability to consumers and the general public,... Mechanisms for assessing and evaluating the anticipated and actual results of this initiative would involve persons with disabilities, using either formal structures or advisory groups."*

The Terms of Reference of the Interim Reference Committee state:

The Committee shall:

a) review and comment on any proposed changes to the programs and services that will be implemented as part of the Multi-year Program and Expenditure Plan.

b) provide suggestions for improvement to the design and delivery of programs and services that are funded through EAPD.

c) provide advice on the accountability framework, including the identification of evaluation issues and processes.

d) make recommendations on an ongoing consultative and/or Reference Committee mechanism for the EAPD initiative.

In the Spring of 2000 the Interim Reference Committee presented the representatives of the three key government departments with a Report and recommendations the purpose of which was to respond to item (d) of the Interim Reference Committee's mandate (above).

Principles for Community Participation

The following principles for community participation in EAPD were identified and these are generally shared by the community and by representatives on the Interim Reference Committee.

Inclusive: Community participation must ensure cross-disability participation that is geographically representative.

Meaningful: Community participation should be included in all aspects of the new program implementation: planning, design, management, evaluation and reporting. Community representatives should also be a full partner in the initiative.

Transparency: The process must be transparent and open to the entire community. Two way communications between the community participation mechanism and the broader community must be a key component of a new initiative. Communication must be a major component of a new EAPD Initiative.

Administratively Simple: The process must be easily managed, minimizing resources that are utilized for purposes other than service delivery. The community does not believe a new "body" or structure needs to be developed.

Accountable: The involvement of the community in the new initiative should be reported in the Annual Report of the new initiative and be a key measure of accountability in an evaluation framework.

Issues

Through the experience of the work of the Interim Reference Committee, in consultation with the broad disability community and through discussion the following issues must be taken into account prior to making recommendations for a community participation framework:

Stakeholders: There exist many stakeholders in an EAPD Initiative, current EAPD participants, past EAPD participants, service providers, consumer organizations, employers or potential employers, post-secondary institutions, and others. The Bilateral Agreement does not define stakeholder but does specify it "would involve persons with disabilities". The under-lying assumption is that persons with disabilities should be a major element of "community involvement".

Representation: Currently no formal or in-formal mechanism exist for nomination, election or designation of stakeholders or persons with disabilities. There are, however, existing mechanisms whereby some protocols have been established for membership and representation of persons with disabilities.

A) Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities:

The Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities is a democratic representative organization of consumers with relatively broad geographic representation through their

member organizations. Representatives on the League's Board of Directors are elected and the League is a member organization of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

B) Disabled Persons Commission

Individuals apply to the Executive Council to sit on the Disabled Persons Commission and must provide a curriculum vitae of their background and relevant experience prior to their appointment. In making appointments, the Disabled Persons Commission Act directs the Executive council *"to ensure that members of the Commission represent the regions of the Province"*. As well, the Act states that *"Each member of the Commission is an independent representative to the Commission and does not represent only the concern of one disability"*. The Province of Nova Scotia has engaged the Disabled Persons Commission as a model of community collaboration in program and policy advice.

C) Community Partnership Committees

Human Resource Development Canada has developed a model of community participation which falls under the broad definition of Partnership Committees. These partnership committees are comprised of stakeholders ranging from service providers to consumer organizations. HRDC is keenly interested in ensuring these partnership committees are fully engaged in decisions around program design and implementation.

Participation: Some student representatives of the current Interim Reference Committee have been unable to attend regular meetings but remain as corresponding members. Student representation has been limited and no mechanism is in place to formalize student participation.

Financial: Currently administrative support and most of the travel and other expenses are carried by the operating budget of the Disabled Persons Commission. The establishment of a structure that would require more travel, additional staff support, research and communications would require dedicated resources.

Complexity: The current structure of EAPD with three departments holding responsibility for different delivery componer of the program, a Federal partner, with some ambiguity over decision making processe have made the work of the Interim Reference Committee challenging.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were thus tabled with the key departmental representatives with the view that a formal Reference Committee would be established in the Fall of 2000.

It is recommended that a standing Reference Committee for the EAPD Initiative be established. The key components of a Terms of Reference for such a Committee follow:

A. Membership

It is recommended that at least 50 percent of the membership of a Reference Committee

be persons with disabilities and it is recommended:

1. That the Community Representatives of the Disabled Persons Commission continue to form the nucleus of a formal reference committee for the EAPD Implementation.

2. That the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities be invited to send one representative as a member of the committee. The League should be encourage to send a current or past participants in EAPD.

3. That the reference committee continue to include two representatives of mental health consumers. The current representatives could engage a process of ensuring the members are representative of this community.

4. One representative be invited to represent the concerns of those individuals who require Addiction Services through EAPD. The Department of Health should nominate this representative.

5. The Committee should be afforded an opportunity to nominate one student representative.

Thus the Reference Committee would be comprised of 12 members. In addition, Community Services, Education, Health and HRDC should be "ex officio" members of the Committee.

B: Mandate

The Reference Committee should be an full partner in the planning, implementation, management, evaluation and reporting of the Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities Initiative. The term "full partnership" and "management" is meant to reflect the meaning and spirit of the bi-lateral agreement. This partnership should include:

a) review and provide advice on any proposed changes to the programs and services that will be implemented as part of the Multi-year Program and Expenditure Plan.

b) provide suggestions for improvement to the design and delivery of programs and services that are funded through EAPD.

c) recommend a mechanism for community participation in the delivery of EAPD services throughout the Province (i.e. regional or local advisory committees)

d) review and provide advice for the accountability framework, including the identification of evaluation issues and processes.

e) provide representation as equal members on all implementation working committees.

C. Meetings

A minimum of three meetings of the Reference Committee should be held annually.

Designated members of working committees will be expected to attend working committee meetings where necessary.

D. Secretariat Support

Reference Committee meetings will be supported by the Disabled Persons

Commission. Should extra-ordinary research be required this would be funded by the EAPD Program.

E. Communications

All minutes and proceedings will be shared with Partnership Committees. Reference Committee members will be responsible to communicate regularly with their respective communities.

EAPD Project Manager has responsibility for developing and implementing a communication and consultation plan. The development of these plans should be reviewed by the Reference Committee and members of the Reference Committee should participate, particularly in their local areas.

F. Travel Costs

All travel costs and other extraordinary support costs will be covered by the funding partners.

G. Evaluation

The evaluation framework that is developed for the EAPD Initiative will include an evaluation of the effectiveness of community participation.

6. SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RESTRUCTURING

The Disabled Persons Commission reviewed it's position concerning Social Assistance Restructuring and approved the following position statement that was transmitted to the Minister of Community Services during the work-up to a re-design of the Income Assistance and Family Benefits Programs as outlined in the Spring Provincial budget. The following is this revised position:

In 1998, the Disabled Persons Commission was asked how best to address the needs of persons with disabilities in a restructured social assistance delivery system and, in particular, to comment on whether there should be a separate legislative framework for persons with disabilities.

In it's brief to Government the Disabled Persons Commission recommended:

> *"the Province of Nova Scotia legislate one program for income assistance for Nova Scotians in financial need. It is further recommended that this new program provide adequate financial assistance to allow individuals and families to live with dignity in the mainstream of our communities."*

Moreover, the Disabled Persons Commission recommended:

> *"concurrent with the development of a new income assistance program, that a separate legislated program be established to address those necessary additional costs or services that are needed by some citizens, particularly citizens with disabilities."*

In response to the adequacy of the new program, we feel deep concern for those individuals, who as the result of a serious disabling condition, would require on-going income and support services to live within our communities with a modicum of dignity. Community living should always be preferable to living in an institution. The new program's rates and conditions (including assets and special needs policies) begs the question. The dearth of community supports further enhances our concern.

The current proposal for a new social assistance system focuses almost exclusively on enhancing an individual's capacity to become self-reliant. Although many persons with disabilities want and need effective employment support services, all persons with disabilities (without financial means) have financial and social support programs requirements which fall outside of the scope of the proposed program.

Furthermore, the program must be fair and equitable to all Nova Scotians, even those who, because of their disability, find themselves outside of the competitive labour market. A re-designed system will have considerable impact and stress on the most vulnerable of our citizens.

Please consider the following issues which have a disproportionate effect on persons with disabilities:

Cost of Disability

Persons with severe disabilities face additional costs in housing, personal care, transportation and other areas of daily living that other persons do not face. The premium that an accessible living arrangement may place on an individual. The very basic need of getting to the grocery store (or food bank) imposes additional costs, for example, in regards to adequate transportation or support for this very basic activity that able-bodied individuals may take for granted.

Special Needs

Persons with disabilities face a range of special need requirements ranging from dietary restrictions, assistive devices, (purchase and repair), that impose additional disadvantages upon them. Communication devices, mobility devices or home adaptations that require additional resources.

Employment Choice

Persons with disabilities face a restricted employment opportunity. For example, many service industry and general labour positions require physical fitness. The range of employment opportunities is ultimately restricted imposing a more lengthy job-readiness requirement.

Chronic or Degenerative Conditions

Many persons with disabilities face a life with a chronic and/or degenerative condition. Expectations for employment are not always possible. The imposition of such an expectation for many persons with disabilities is clearly inappropriate and contra-indicated.

Dependancy

Many persons with disabilities must depend on income assistance in order to live. Dependancy in this instance is not negative in the sense of "taking advantage" but is rather an appropriate and necessary outcome for both the individual and the program. The program key is to allow the individual to live in dignity with appropriate support services and the ability to participate to the degree possible in community life.

The "Welfare" System

Persons with disabilities do not feel they belong in the "welfare system". Programs for re-training, job readiness, transition planning, are not the answer for some individuals with significant or degenerative disabilities; they should not be "punished" or negatively impacted by a re-designed system whose whole focus is self-reliance. Employment supports are necessary for the segment of persons with disabilities who are capable of competitive employment, however some program allowances must be made for the segment who are not ever likely to become attached to the labour market.

RECOMMENDATION FOR SEPARATE PROGRAM FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:

In consideration of the focus on employment and self-reliance for the new Income Assistance Program and in recognition that many persons with disabilities have significant barriers to achieve self-reliance, the Disabled Persons Commission recommends that a separate income assistance/social support program be designed for persons with disabilities who are unable to attain competitive employment and who clearly fall outside of the scope of the new proposed program.

This new program should:

- Provide more adequate financial assistance to individuals with disabilities to ensure that they may live with dignity in our communities without fear of isolation or unrealizable expectations;

- Have a Special Needs policy include disability support items not strictly employment related;

- Recognize the unique additional costs to people with disabilities individuals should be allowed a reasonable amount of liquid assets and families should be encouraged, through appropriate policy considerations, to contribute to the needs of a disabled family member;

- Foster a climate of self-reliance by allowing an additional monthly income at the rate allowed to Family Benefit Recipients prior to April 1, 2000;

- Have the rates of a separate program based upon the former Family Benefits to ensure that persons who have no alternatives don't fall further into poverty.

- The new program should adopt a functional definition for disability - similar to the Ontario Disability Support Program definition which is:

  "A person has a disability if they have a substantial mental or physical impairment that restricts one or more activities of daily living which includes personal care, functioning in the community, and in the workplace and is expected to last at least one year."

- The new program should implement a rigorous multi-disciplinary functional and financial assessment process to determine program eligibility. This assessment and screening process should provide both the necessary checks and balances required for program integrity. A redesigned appeal process for persons with disabilities should be streamlined to be responsive and implemented to be as non-adversarial as possible. Persons with disabilities should be conspicuously represented on appeal board.

In conclusion, the new program will likely help the ready-to-employ but doesn't address the needs of many persons with disabilities. The new program's parameters obligates a separate income and support program for persons with disabilities.

7. WHEELCHAIR INITIATIVE

The disabled Persons Commission approved in principle the recommendations of the Report and Recommendations of the Wheelchair Initiative Committee and transmitted this report to the Ministers of Health and Community Services.

Background

In 1999, the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities (LEO) tabled a report with several Departments of the Nova Scotia Government and requested the Province consider the implementation of a wheelchair program for Nova Scotians based on the Manitoba model.

Following these presentations by LEO the Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission was asked to meet with LEO and discuss the potential for developing a Report and Recommendations for Government to consider in the area of wheelchair acquisition. The Commission in the past had tabled two reports with the Province concerning the need for a Technical Aids Program and felt a wheelchair initiative would b a key component of any broader technical aids program.

In initial discussions between LEO and the Disabled Persons Commission it was recognized there are many stakeholders that have a major interest in a wheelchair program and who could bring expertise and capacity to the discussion.

Those stakeholders included:

Abilities Foundation
Canadian Paraplegics Association
Muscular Dystrophy Association
Multiple Sclerosis Society
Nova Scotia Rehabilitation Centre
IWK/Grace Health Centre
Canadian Red Cross Society
Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities
Disabled Persons Commission

As well, it was recognized the Departments of Health and Community Services are clearly the two Departments whose responsibilities include health, wellness and self-sufficiency - all of which are affected by an individual's ability to acquire a wheelchair when needed.

Process

Therefore a Wheelchair Initiative Committee was established to include representatives of the identified stakeholder organizations as well as contributions from the Department of Health and the Department of Community Services.

This Wheelchair Initiative Committee adopted the following Terms of Reference:

1. To identify the current situation in Nova Scotia.

2. To identify the relevant issues.

3. To make recommendations to the Provincial Government.

The work of this Committee proceeded through the Fall/Winter of 1999/2000 and this Report and Recommendations are the culmination of these discussions.

The Report identifies the current situation identifies the relevant issues and makes Recommendations on how the situation can be addressed. (A copy of the full report is available from the Disabled Persons Commission.)

Issues

The Committee identified several key issues:

- Individuals require wheelchairs for very basic daily living reasons, it should be viewed as an "entitlement" or an essential component of full citizenship.

- Acquisition, in a timely manner, of a properly prescribed and functioning wheelchair is a critical intervention for children to assist them with early development. Delays will have implications on the child's development.

- Acquisition, in a timely manner, for an adult is critical to the rehabilitation process, re-introduction to community living and thee achievement of self-sufficiency.

- Acquisition of a properly prescribed wheelchair will ultimately prevent further complications.

- Delays in replacement a properly prescribed and fitted wheelchair may lead to medical complications and costly hospitalization (skin breakdown, skeletal-muscular problems, etc.)

- Persons are staying in Rehabilitation settings longer than is necessary.

- Assisting an individual acquire funding for a wheelchair is not rehabilitation and sustains the concept of dependancy.

- Assisting an individual acquire funding for a wheelchair takes an inordinate amount of time and resources of professional staff.

- A longer stay in a Rehabilitation setting waiting for a wheelchair results in poor bed utilization, particularly at the acute care end. (the per diem is also in the $1,100 to 1,500 dollars per day in a rehabilitation setting.)

- Delays in returning to the community impact on the rehabilitation process. When an individual is physically and emotionally ready to return to community life it is critical there

be as little delay as possible.

- While many individuals have difficulty in identifying the necessary resources for wheelchair acquisition, only some Individuals who are affiliated with a service provider i.e. MS Society, MD Association, CPA, etc. get some assistance to help them acquire a wheelchair.

- The complexity of the system is a major issue. Many stakeholders, policies and sources of funding complicate rather then help.

- It is demeaning for a person with a disability to have to approach service clubs and the public for charity to acquire a basic necessity of life/mobility.

- Fairness: The community has raised the issue of fairness many times. There is a program for artificial limbs but acquisition of a wheelchair, a very basic mobility device, is not provided for.

- A disincentive to employment acquisition of such basic aids as wheelchairs act as a powerful disincentive for persons on income assistance to strive towards self-sufficiency.

Recommendations

Members of the Committee believe citizens have a right to personal mobility. The Committee feels strongly wheelchairs are a basic need for someone who has lost the ability to walk due to disease, accident or congenital condition. The members of the Committee are key stakeholders in the area of wheelchair provision, funding, inventory and repair. The Committee is committed to the issue and is willing to assist government in designing a solution and brings with it community capacity that could more appropriately be utilized in this area.

The Committee recognizes government is currently undergoing significant reform in Community Care and Income Assistance and an opportunity exists to design a program that could address this very basic human need.

1. It is recommended the Province of Nova Scotia develop an initiative whereby the acquisition of wheelchairs (manual, powered or scooters) be considered MSI insured.

   The committee also recognizes the commitment of the Province to "In Unison" and the policy framework that points towards separating eligibility for support services, such as wheelchairs, from eligibility for income support or other programs.

2. It is recommended that such a Wheelchair Initiative be a universally accessible program for both children and adult individuals living in the community or in institutions.

   The Committee also recognizes the complexity and confusion that exists now in the manner in which a person must acquire a wheelchair.

3. It is recommended a single entry system be established for assessment and approvals.

4. It is recommended the necessary policy and protocols be established in order that acquisition is timely and responds to the unique requirements of the person in need of this basic mobility device.

   The timing is right. As systems are re-designed and implemented a window of opportunity exists to establish the necessary policies and procedures that will respond to this basic need over the long term.

5. It is recommended the Wheelchair Initiative be developed as part of the current design, re-design and implementation of the Social Assistance System, the Community Care Single Entry Initiative and the Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities Program.

   The Committee recognizes there are cost efficiencies through proper inventory and re-cycling that will provide economies of scale that will be critical to this Initiative.
   It is also important to recognize that Committee members have experience and expertise in this area.

6. It is recommended that in the development of the Wheelchair Initiative an inventory and re-cycling component be intrinsic to the Initiative.

7. It is recommended a Wheelchair Initiative also include provisions for wheelchair repair and replacement.

8. It is recommended the province utilize the knowledge and capacity of the community stakeholders in the design and implementation of this initiative.

   The members of this Committee have a stake in the reforms currently underway and have agreed to make themselves available for consultation as the new systems are designed and implemented.

9. It is recommended this group of stakeholders be consulted regularly with the members of this committee as policies and procedures are developed for the new Community Care Single Entry Program of the Department of Health and the re-design of the Province's Social Assistance System.

8. BRAILLE DAY IN NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia marked Braille Day in Canada for the first time on February 9, 2000.

The day was a tribute to the genius of Louis Braille, who, almost 200 years ago, revolutionized the lives of people who are blind and visually impaired with his invention of a simple yet sophisticated system of six raised dots. Used in various combinations, the six "magic" dots can be used to form letters of the alphabet, musical notations, chemistry symbols, numbers, and punctuation.

Braille is to the blind person what the printed word is to the sighted individual - access to information and contact with the outside world.

Nova Scotia marked the day with a Proclamation Ceremony held at the Nova Scotia House of Assembly with Premier John Hamm and Minister Peter Christie in attendance to bring greetings and proclaim February 9 as "Braille Day in Nova Scotia". (The Proclamation appears in Appendix A).

The ceremony was highlighted by several presentations that included a song in honour of Louis Braille "Thank You Louis Braille" written and performed by Dennis McCormack, a Graduate of Halifax School for the Blind, composer, songwriter and historian.

Other keynote speakers included:

Elizabeth Hamilton, Executive Director, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Nova Scotia - Prince Edward Island Division

Ann MacCuspie, PHD, Director, Programs for Students who Are Blind or Visually Impaired, Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority

Barbara LeGay, LLB, Pension Advocate and Braille User

Meredith Ripley-Brown, Coordinator, Braille Day in Nova Scotia

The event was an excellent venue in which the Braille system was promoted and highlighted as a critical piece in the literacy needs of persons who are blind or vision impaired.

Closing Remarks: Meredith Ripley-Brown, Coordinator, Braille Day in Nova Scotia

9. NOVA SCOTIA ACCESS AWARENESS WEEK

This year Nova Scotia Access Awareness was celebrated again. The week affords an opportunity for the disability community to heighten the awareness of the general public on the needs and abilities of people with disabilities. This years theme for the week was "Full Citizenship For All".

9.1 CITIZENSHIP FORUM

This year, in order to mark the week, the Disabled Persons Commission, in collaboration with Partnership for Access Awareness - Nova Scotia, held a "Citizenship Forum". The purpose of the forum was to provide an opportunity for the disability community to meet and discuss issues of importance to the achievement of "Full Citizenship For All".

The range of topics covered were:

Full Citizenship Through Inclusive Transportation

This session provided an opportunity for the Inclusive Transportation Pilot Project Initiative to be presented to the community: the successes of the initiative, the issues being faced and where it will go in the future.

Full Citizenship Through Equal Access

This session provided an opportunity for the details of the Community Access-Ability Program to be provided directly to the disability community. As well, an overview of the Nova Scotia Building Code Act.

Full Citizenship Through Inclusive Schooling

This session provided the Department of Education an opportunity on the implementation of the Special Education Policy and to discuss directly with the Community the issues and successes of the policy.

Full Citizenship through Personal Choice and Self-Management

A presentation of the Self-Managed Model of Attendant Care by the Metro Resource Centre for Independent Living and the Supported Self-Management model by the SSG Cooperative.

Full Citizenship Through Human Rights Legislation

A presentation and time for discussion on the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act by the Director of the Human Rights Commission. This provided some mechanism to adders the issue of the need for a Nova Scotians With Disabilities Act.

Full Citizenship through In Unison and the EAPD Initiative

This provided a forum for a report on the activities of the APED Implementation Committee as well as an update on the implementation of In Unison.

9.2 THE MEL HEBB HOUR GLASS ACTION AWARDS

The Commission, as part of it's mandate to advise the Coordinating Committee of Ministers on "what community in the Province has done the most in any year to improve awareness of accessibility of persons with disabilities" has supported the work of the Partnership for Access Awareness Hour Glass Action Awards Committee.

Each year during Nova Scotia Access Awareness Week, the efforts of individuals, organizations, and businesses that have made exemplary accommodations to their environment and/or operations in order to be more accessible to the public are recognized. This year the Award has been renamed in memory of Mel Hebb, who passed away October 3, 1999. Mel provided leadership and inspiration as Chairperson of the Awards Committee, as well as being a volunteer and friend of the Committee and Board of Directors of the Partnership for Access Awareness - Nova Scotia.

This year's award winners were:

Atlantic Superstore, New Glasgow Market

Paul MacLeod of the Atlantic Superstore, New Glasgow Market is the recipient of this year's Mel Hebb Hourglass Action Award.

Paul and his staff are recognized for their specialized services and inclusive attitude in their employment policy and recruitment of employees in the New Glasgow store. His leadership is an excellent model for employers in providing equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. For over a year, the store has employed six individuals from the disabled community resulting in a positive impact on their lives as well as their communities.

To assist disabled employees, the store provides transportation through the Central

Highland Association of the Disabled which weekly buses employees to work, free of charge.

Judy Hughes of Pictou County Let Abilities Work, nominator of the Atlantic Superstore for the Mel Hebb Hourglass Action Award states, *"The Atlantic Superstore, New Glasgow Market, is a tremendous asset to the people of Pictou County and the first of its kind to extend a wide, welcoming hand to all that live in this region."*

Landsdowne Outdoor Recreational Development Association

Landsdowne Outdoor Recreational Development Association receives this award for their efforts and commitment to seek out and partner with the disabled community for the provision of accessible outdoor recreational opportunities.

Established in 1986, the Association seeks out financial and volunteer resources to develop and maintain the park and its attractions, providing accessibility to all.

This service has been recognized by the provincial Rick Hansen Facility Excellence Award from the Recreation Council on Disability in Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries Minister's Award of Merit and the ATV "Maritimer of the Week" Award.

Judy Hughes of Pictou County Let Abilities Work, nominated the Landsdowne Outdoor Recreational Development Association for the award and states, *"They provide a unique outdoor facility which sets an outstanding example of charity in practice and is a source of pride for the community and all involved."*

Linda Stiles

Linda Stiles receives this year's "*Outstanding Individual Mel Hebb Hourglass Action Award*". Linda is a key player within the disabled community with over twenty years of dedicated hard work and commitment to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Linda served as chair of the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities for six years, was a founding member and past chairperson of the Cumberland Equal Rights for the Disabled, is currently a member of the Transportation Committee of Cumberland County, the Regional Partnership Committee - HRDC, Partnership for Access Awareness, Cumberland Disabilities Partnership Committee for Transition to Work, council delegate and alternate for the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, the Community Health Board, and the Network of Entrepreneurs with Disabilities.

Awards bestowed upon Linda for her achievements include the YWCA Outstanding Women's Award, LEO Lifestyle Award, Volunteer of the Year for Cumberland County and the Province of Nova Scotia, and the Council of Canadians Award of Recognition.

Gerald Fredericks of Cumberland Equal Rights for the Disabled nominated Linda Stiles and states: *"She is an active and fearless advocate for the disabled community and is know throughout the Province and Cumberland County in particular."*

Shaun McCormick

The Late Shaun McCormick has been chosen to receive the *Hourglass Action Award for Lifetime Achievement* for his lifetime of dedicated service. He became disabled with a spinal cord injury at the age of twenty-one; Shaun saw every challenge as an opportunity.

Shaun worked with Maritime Life Assurance for twenty-nine years and through his work helped thousands of military staff with disabilities reintegrate into their communities and move on with their lives. Shaun also served as chair of the Disabled Persons Commission.

Through his efforts, he was instrumental in getting disability entrenched in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He chaired COPAH (now know as the Council of Canadians with Disabilities) and was a representative on the national board of National Access Awareness Week.

Locally he was a founding member of the Metro Disabled Individuals Alliance (DIAL), as well as the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities and Peer Partnership, the predecessor of the Metro Resource Centre for Independent Living. Awards received in recognition of his accomplishments were the Vanier Award for outstanding young Canadians and Halifax-Dartmouth Metro Area Outstanding Citizen Award.

Nominated by Metro Resource Centre for Independent Living - Halifax, Shaun McCormick will be remembered as *"a visionary with a great insight into human strength, which he used to make a difference in helping people deal with disability."*

Melbourne Hebb

The Late Mel Hebb has been chosen to receive the Hourglass Action Award for Lifetime Achievement in recognition of a lifetime of dedicated service. At the age of nine, he was disabled with polio. In spite of his physical limitations and despite physical barriers, Mel completed his Bachelor of Commerce at Dalhousie University and from 1961-69 managed New Leaf Enterprises, a vocational service center of the Abilities Foundation of Nova Scotia. His strong leadership skills, enthusiasm and courage in this position lead him to the Directorship of Orthotics and Prosthetics at the Nova Scotia Rehabilitation Centre from 1977-94.

Upon retiring, Mel wrote and published his life story, "Wheels to Victory: The Mel Hebb Story" a mammoth and emotionally difficult task. Despite many obstacles, his story portrays a successful and satisfying lifetime which he narrates in a matter-of-fact manner with his own unique sense of humor interjected throughout the book.

In retirement, Mel chaired the Hourglass Action Awards Committee for two years, as well as serving as a member of the Nova Scotia Access Awareness Week Provincial Planning Committee. He advocated on behalf of persons with disabilities as volunteer chair of the Access-A-Bus Advisory Committee in Halifax and participated in the Canadian Paraplegic Association and Polio Survivors Support Group of Nova Scotia.

Nominated by the Abilities Foundation of Nova Scotia, Mel Hebb wanted disabled people to know *"there is indeed life after disability and with the right combination of support and determination there is little a disabled person cannot achieve."*

10. OTHER ISSUES AND INITIATIVES

10.1 Employment Services Directory

The Disabled Persons Commission produced an Employment Services Resource Directory in order to assist disabled job seekers access the most appropriate employment assistance service in their area. The Resource Directory is available by contacting the Disabled Persons Commission or can viewed on the Commission's web page at www.gov.ns.ca/disa

10.2 Team Work Co-operative

The Commission continues to support and participate on Team Work Cooperative Ltd. of Team Work Co-operative Ltd. In 1999-2000 the commitment to the establishment of a full continuum of employment assistance services continued through participation on the Co-operatives Board of Directors and through continued collaboration with partnership committees and community stakeholders.

10.3 Inclusive Transportation in Nova Scotia

The Commission continues to participate on the Inclusive Transportation Steering Committee that is overseeing three Inclusive Transportation Pilot Projects in Antigonish-Guysborough, Colchester and Yarmouth. In addition this Committee oversees the Accessible Transportation assistance Program that provides financial assistance to organizations that are purchasing accessible vehicles for inclusive community transportation services.

10.4 Disability Employment Tool Kit

In 1999-2000 the Commission commenced collaborative work on the development of a "Disability Employment Toolkit" for both job-seekers with disabilities and employers. We are doing this work in collaboration with Dr. Joan Cummings, a past Chair-Person of the Commission and other community partners. It is expected this project will be completed in the Autumn of 2000.

10.5 Access to Government Real Property

The Commission continues to participate on an inter-departmental committee that is working towards defining a clear and proper corporate policy for access to government real property. At the current time audits are being planned in order to assess a working access check list and to quantify the amount of retro-fit that may be required upon adoption of a progressive policy.

10.6 Nova Scotia Building Code

The Nova Scotia Building Code Act has a requirement that a person with a physical disability be appointed to the Nova Scotia Building Advisory Committee. The Commission's representative has been confirmed as Ralph Ferguson, Pictou, who is also a member of the Commission.

10.7 Nova Scotia Neurotrauma Society

The Nova Scotia Neurotrauma Society was created as a partnership interested in promoting the fields of neurotrauma research, prevention and rehabilitation. A network of provincial neurotrauma funds was promoted by the Rick Hansen Man In Motion Foundation, as part of the tenth year anniversary celebration at the end of the Man In Motion World Tour.

The Nova Scotia Neurotrauma Society is made up of representatives of the stakeholder community and key governmental representatives. The Disabled Persons Commission is pleased to support and facilitate the activities of this Society.

In 1998, the Society awarded the following grants:

Canadian Paraplegics Association (Nova Scotia): $14,080.70
"Nova Scotia Peer Support Volunteer Training Program"

Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia: $13,500.00
"Behavioural Based Programming for Transitional Living Facility" Aisleigh House

Dalhousie University: Dr. Gary Allen: $27,069.00
"The Role of Regional Brain Catecholamines in Recovery of Motor Function Following Traumatic Brain Injury"

Dalhousie University: Dr. Theo Hagg : $16,144.00
"The NT-3 for Functional Recovery of Corticospinal Motor Systems in Adult Rats"

Dalhousie University: Student Fellowship: Ms. Lyana Sisca: $8,000.00

Spinal Cord Injury Prevention Association: $7,700.00
"Bicycle Helmets for Children of Families with Low Income"

On behalf of the Nova Scotia Neurotrauma we would like to thank and recognize the support of the Department of Health in this initiative.

10.8 Information and Referral

Staff of the Disabled Persons Commission assist individuals with disabilities and the general public to understand and access programs and services that are designed to assist individuals with disabilities. The Commission has Toll Free telephone lines: 1-800-565-8280 (TTY: 1-877-996-9954).

APPENDIX A

PROCLAMATION
BRAILLE DAY IN NOVA SCOTIA
February 9, 2000

WHEREAS braille has been an effective means of communication for people who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired since 1829 when it was invented in Paris, France by Louis Braille; and

WHEREAS braille is a building block to literacy, independence, and successful employment; and

WHEREAS the Government of Nova Scotia is committed to the principles of equality and freedom for all, and the belief that all people can participate in the vibrant social, political, and cultural life of Nova Scotia;

THEREFORE , I, John Hamm, Premier of Nova Scotia, do hereby proclaim February 9th, 2000 to be Braille Day in Nova Scotia.

Signed in Halifax, Nova Scotia on the 9th day of February, 2000.

_____
John Hamm
Premier of Nova Scotia

_____
Peter Christie
Minister of Community Services
Minister responsible for the Disabled Persons' Commission Act

CMac/bc